



County of San Diego

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Guidelines for the Food Service Operator on Employee Health & Hygiene

Food safety and prevention of foodborne illness are essential parts of a successful food service operation. Handwashing (personal hygiene), illness (addressing employees with communicable diseases) and employee training are some of the key factors in limiting the spread of disease within a food facility. The purpose of the guideline is to provide information and present intervention measures to minimize foodborne illness potentially caused by food handlers. Working together, the food facilities in San Diego County and the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) can help minimize the economic and public health impacts of foodborne illness.

BACKGROUND

The health and hygiene of employees who prepare food for consumers should be a major concern of every food service operator. There is always the opportunity for a food handler to introduce a pathogen, a toxic or foreign material during the different stages of food handling and serving, causing the food to be unsafe or adulterated. A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) report affirmed that, "food workers may transmit pathogens to food from a contaminated surface, from another food, or from hands contaminated with organisms from their gastrointestinal tract".

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that, "contamination of food by an infected food worker is the most common mode of transmission of enteric illness, such as Hepatitis A, in foodborne disease outbreaks." Data collected in the CDC Surveillance of Foodborne-Disease Outbreaks – US, 1988-1992 and 1993-1997, revealed that the two most commonly reported practices that contributed to foodborne disease were improper holding temperatures of food and poor personal hygiene of food workers. Furthermore, according to CDC, diseases caused by food "may cause an estimated 76 million cases of gastrointestinal illnesses, 325,000 serious illnesses resulting in hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths each year".

HANDWASHING/PERSONAL HYGIENE

Unwashed hands may be the most important means by which pathogens are transmitted. Good personal hygiene of employees must be strictly implemented and monitored by the food service operator. A food handler survey conducted in 2003 indicates 94 % of the employees know the importance of handwashing. Inspection remarks, however, show that there are needed improvements in handwashing and the provision of adequate soap, paper towels and hot water at accessible handwashing sinks.



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Management is encouraged to demonstrate proper handwashing practices to their employees. Thoroughly wash hands and parts of arms exposed to direct food contact. Good handwashing will take approximately twenty seconds. Vigorously rub hands and arms with cleanser and warm water,

particularly, areas between the fingers, around and under the nails. Finish with a clean water rinse. Some facilities have implemented mandatory handwashing to be done at specific time intervals during a shift. Proper handwashing helps to prevent the spread of disease.

Common sense and the law indicate that hands should be washed before handling food. There is more than one occasion to wash hands. Using the following checklist, food facility operators can quiz their staff to see how often they know to wash their hands.

- ☐ **Immediately before** food preparation, handling unpackaged food, cleaning equipment and utensils
- ☐ **Before** serving food or handling clean tableware and serving utensils in the dining area
- ☐ **As often as necessary** during food preparation to prevent cross-contamination when changing tasks, between working with raw foods and preparing ready-to-eat foods
- ☐ **After** touching body parts
- ☐ **After** using the toilet room
- ☐ **After** coughing, sneezing, using a handkerchief or disposable tissue, using tobacco, eating or drinking
- ☐ **After** handling soiled equipment or utensils
- ☐ **After** engaging in any other activity that contaminates the hands

Employees can use utensils, such as, scoops, forks, tongs, paper wrappers, gloves, or other implements, to prepare and serve ready-to-eat foods (e.g. sandwiches). Handling of ready-to-eat foods without implements by an employee who complies with the hand washing requirements, may be allowed under current law. Gloves should be used when handling food and utensils if the employee has any cuts, sores, rashes, artificial nails, nail polish, rings, uncleanable orthopedic support devices or unclean fingernails. Replace or wash gloves as often as hand washing is required. Do not reuse single-use gloves.



The food service operator has the responsibility of ensuring that proper facilities, equipment and supplies are provided in their food facilities for proper employee personal hygiene.

- ☐ Provide adequate toilet facilities for employees that are clean and in good repair.
- ☐ Provide toilet tissue paper in a permanently installed wall mounted dispenser
- ☐ Provide handwashing facilities within or adjacent to toilet rooms and in food preparation areas. They should be conveniently located and accessible at all times to food handlers.
- ☐ Provide adequate hot and cold running water under pressure.
- ☐ Provide cleanser (soap) and single-use towels in dispensers or hot-air blowers.
- ☐ Provide an employee changing area or locker room where employees may change or store clothes. This room/area should be separate from toilets, food storage, food preparation areas and utensil washing. Clothing or personal effects shall not be stored in any other area on the premises.
- ☐ Ensure employees wear clean, washable clothing or uniforms and hairnets or caps to confine all hair.

Foodhandlers with illness:

Food handlers ill with a transmissible disease shall not be allowed to prepare food in a retail food facility. The potential spread of disease to coworkers and customers is not good for business. The food service operator has the ultimate responsibility to exclude an ill employee from food handling tasks. Intervention measures must be implemented to ensure that no employee who may be ill and symptomatic with an infectious foodborne illness does any food handling. Measures should include but not limited to the following:



- ❑ Be cognizant of symptoms associated with a foodborne illness or an acute gastrointestinal illness (see Table for summary of pathogens and symptoms), such as:
 - o Diarrhea
 - o Fever
 - o Vomiting
 - o Sore throat with fever
 - o Infected wounds, Boils
 - o Jaundice
- ❑ Encourage voluntary employee reporting when ill or exposed to an infectious illness
- ❑ Encourage ill employees to seek professional medical attention
- ❑ Respect the confidentiality of personal medical information
- ❑ Exclude ill employees from food handling.
- ❑ **Report suspected food handler illness to the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) by calling the Epidemiology Liaison at (619) 338-2356.**
- ❑ Assist DEH with any associated environmental assessments or inspections. The goal is to identify the source of any potential problems to minimize the further risk of foodborne illness to others.
- ❑ Facilitate the removal of ill employees when ordered by DEH or Public Health Services. An official notice will be issued in this case.
- ❑ Facilitate the reinstatement of an employee when approved to return to work by Public Health Services. An official clearance will be issued in this case.
- ❑ Evaluate the provision of paid sick leave days, especially for confirmed illness diagnoses.
- ❑ Evaluate the provision of employee health insurance.
- ❑ Notify DEH Epidemiology Liaison at (619) 338-2356 if there are unresolved reports of customer illness. The food facility may also refer the customer to this number.

Please note that medical providers are mandated to report approximately 88 diseases or conditions to the Public Health Services. Reportable diseases include foodborne diseases, such as, Salmonellosis, Shigellosis, Campylobacteriosis, E coli 0157-H7 infection, Amebiasis, Giardiasis, and Hepatitis A. DEH can not disclose a specific diagnosis to a food facility operator. DEH will work with the food facility in the event a food handler is identified as having a reportable illness of concern.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING:

The food facility operator must ensure that every food handler employed in his/her food facility has adequate training and puts food safety procedures into practice. State law requires an owner or employee with a food safety certification in every food facility that prepares food. Progressive businesses have chosen to have multiple employees with food safety certifications. County code requires training for every food handler in a retail food facility that prepares food and beverage. This training may be done by a County approved third party trainer or completed in house.

The standards of knowledge in food safety include but are not limited to:

- ✓ Foodborne illness including associated terms such as, microorganisms, hepatitis A and toxins that can contaminate food, and major contributing factors for foodborne illness
- ✓ Relationship between time and temperature and microorganisms with respect to foodborne illness
- ✓ Relationship between personal hygiene and food safety
- ✓ Methods of preventing food contamination in all stages of food handling and storage
- ✓ Procedures for cleaning and sanitizing equipment and utensils

PREVENTION OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS:

The risk of foodborne illness can be limited through implementation of cost effective handwashing programs, illness reporting and employee training. Food service employees, employers, medical providers and health officials are working together to ensure there is a healthy workforce. Healthy, well-trained food handlers lead the way for healthy customers.

Table - Summary of Pathogens Transmissible Through Food					
PATHOGENS	INFECTIVE DOSE	SYMPTOMS			
		Diarrhea	Fever	Vomiting	Other
Often Transmitted by Food Contaminated by Infected Persons					
Caliciviruses (Noroviruses)	Unknown Probably very low	✓	✓	✓	
Hepatitis A virus	10-100 virus particles		✓		Jaundice
Shigella	As few as 10 cells	✓	✓	✓	
Salmonella	As few as 15-20 cells	✓	✓	✓	
Staphylococcus aureus	1µ of toxin (pop > 100,000 MPN/g)	✓		✓	
Streptococcus pyogenes	Low		✓		Sore throat
Occasionally Transmitted by Food Contaminated by Infected Persons					
Campylobacter jejuni	As few as 400-500 cells	✓	✓	✓	
E coli O157:H7	5-10 viable cells	✓	✓	✓	
Vibrio cholerae	Large numbers (>1M cells)	✓		✓	
Cryptosporidium	1 or more cysts	✓			
Entamoeba histolytic	1 or more cysts	✓	✓		
Taenia solium	Low				
Yersinia enterocolitica	Unknown	✓	✓	✓	

References: FDA-CFSAN 2001 Food Code

Control of Communicable Diseases Manual by James Chin, Editor. APHA, 2000.

References

California Health and Safety Code, §113700 et seq. CA Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL)

California Code of Regulations, Title 17, §2500. Disease Reporting

San Diego County Code, § 61.205 et seq. Foodhandler Training

www.sdcdeh.org (DEH web site)

www.cdc.org (Healthy Topics A to Z)

www.foodsafety.gov (Foodsafety information and link to product recall)